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of history are such facts, and that among these personalities Christ is supreme, and therefore of supreme value as indicating the kind of character we may expect to find in God. As a mere matter of fact, his life has thus untold significance. Moreover, there must be taken with this fact the further fact of Christ's own consciousness of mission from God—his sense that the very meaning of his life was that it revealed God. This ultimately means—what has been rightly called the greatest proposition of the Christian religion—that “God is like Christ”; that we may believe that there is at the heart of the world just such a love as Christ's, a love that suffers with men, unstinted, endlessly self-giving; that this is what is meant by calling God Father. If we can look at Christ in this

way, as a true manifestation of God's own character and love, then we can see that God's relation to us is not an external one; that he is no mere on-looker; but that, because our Father, he suffers in our sin, bears as a burden the sin and suffering of us all, and cannot be satisfied when one child of his turns away in sorrow and sin. The cross of Christ would then drop as deep a plummet, as we can conceive, into this dark problem of suffering and sin. It would give us universally penetrating and enduring light. For then indeed it would be true that “the agony of the world's struggle is the very life of God. Were he mere spectator, perhaps he too would call life cruel. But in the unity of our lives with his, our joy is his joy; our pain is his.”

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## A PLEA FOR UNPREJUDICED HISTORICAL BIBLICAL STUDY

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*Such a plea as this of Dr. Richardson's may seem out of place in the modern world. Unfortunately it is not. For this reason we print it, although to a very large majority of our readers it would appear as if a voice had spoken from the days in which the BIBLICAL WORLD was first published. Yet an entire generation of men has risen since this magazine came into existence. These men are the inheritors of a church which has made astonishing strides since those days, but just now it is suffering from a recrudescence of obscurantism and reaction. This article will at least serve to revive our determination not to be stampeded by misrepresentation or hard names.*

All serious students of the Bible are convinced of the value of archaeology for biblical study. For many years light has been given us from the ancient

East until the dark places of the past shine with a new glory. So many confirmations have been given, so many illustrations have been furnished, that

we are in danger of attributing too much authority to certain archaeological facts.

We need to discriminate. We particularly need to distinguish between "confirmation" and "illustration." We need to remember that archaeology has its disproofs as well as its proofs, and to accept the proofs only and to put aside the disproofs is neither scientific nor honest. This is where a number of writers of widely differing schools have gone astray. The traditionalists, on the one side, and the liberals, on the other side, have both appealed to the findings of archaeology to settle their disputes, and both sides can be shown to have deliberately accepted a part only of the evidence furnished.

On one side we have the conservative scholars glorying in the idea that archaeology has forever supported the traditionalist side, and banished the findings of the higher critics. We hear Professor Sayce saying:

In dealing with the history of the past we are thus confronted with two utterly opposed methods, one objective, the other subjective, one resting on a basis of verifiable facts, the other on the unsupported and unsupportable assumptions of the modern scholar. The one is the method of archaeology, the other of the so-called "higher criticism." Between the two the scientifically trained mind can have no hesitation in choosing.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand we have scholars telling us that the archaeological evidences of the past fifty years have forever made impossible the traditionalist position. What is more remarkable is the fact that both sides appeal to the same archaeological facts.

That this is bewildering to the average man is very evident, and he knows not

which side to follow when the facts seem to support either side. He is not in a position to inspect the monumental evidences cited, neither has he the necessary equipment for such inspection. What, then, is he to do? He can do nothing save wait until some agreement is reached among the scholars.

That the state of affairs described above is prevalent is known to all who have gone deeply into biblical and archaeological studies. It is not necessary to give quotations from the differing sides; enough to know that this regrettable condition prevails. What is the cause of it? It is not merely a question of traditionalists pitted against the higher critics, we think; rather is it the outcome of the opinion men have formed of the nature of the Bible. It is difficult for some people, trained in a certain environment, breathing a certain atmosphere, to look at the facts of history as they actually are. The historical judgment of even great scholars is unnecessarily influenced by their preferences for or against a certain view of the Bible. On the one side is a desire to prove that the Bible is infallibly inspired, or at least to prove that the Bible contains nothing but the most reliable historical information; or at least, if literal inspiration is no longer tenable, yet the text is not mere legend but is genuine tradition, which is significant for our present religious life. On the other hand there are people who wish to run down the Bible simply because it has been a book of sanctity to many people, and the worse the mistake is in which the biblical tradition appears the more they rejoice. What seems particularly difficult for both sides is to be absolutely

<sup>1</sup> Sayce, *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies*.

impartial and possess no preferences either for or against the Bible, its text, or the worth of the information which it conveys. No other work has been treated so badly as the Bible. We have adopted methods of study and interpretation in regard to it which, if applied to any other literature, would wreck literature. In spite of the splendid work done on the Bible by an army of great scholars, their findings have not yet found their way to, and become the common property of, the average Bible student. It is imperative that we study the Bible historically and scientifically. One of the greatest causes of the neglect of Bible reading and study today is right here—the unhistorical method has closed the Bible for thousands in the church and outside of it, and it will remain closed unless we are honest in approach and method of study.

How very hard it is for some to believe that the old historical records of the Old Testament must be subjected to the same tests we apply to all the other documents coming from that same period. It is very singular that scholars who will be strictly scientific when they deal with the records of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, or Rome forsake their science as soon as they approach the Hebrew records. Why should not the same tests be applied to one as to the others? The Hebrews were a definite people, living at a definite period under definite conditions. They lived in the stream of humanity and must be studied along with the other nations of the past and according to the same standards. No theory of inspiration, nor of origins, nor of authority can save the Bible from the scrutiny of the his-

torical student and the modern well-trained scholar. He has a God-given right to examine this book, and it would be to stifle his gifts were he to allow a theory to close his eye or his mind where this book is concerned. But having claimed this right for the scholar we at the same time demand that he shall examine it honestly as a scholar. His theories, his prejudices, must be laid aside if he would do honest work, and not until he has examined the evidence in the white light of truth should he pronounce. But who is sufficient for these things?

Let us briefly examine one narrative in the Old Testament to illustrate what we mean by a plea for a purely scientific study of the narratives.

Much discussion has gathered round the wonderful fourteenth chapter of Genesis. We need not, at this time, enter into any discussion as to the date of this chapter, seeing that there are yet many critical questions awaiting an answer, and until such questions are answered we are not safe in giving a date. Many scholars agree that the Amraphel of this chapter is none other than Hammurabi, the sixth king of the First Dynasty of Babylon. He reigned from 2123 to 2081 B.C.<sup>1</sup> It has also been generally accepted that Hammurabi and Abraham were contemporaries. It is at this point we challenge many scholars. Is the Amraphel of Gen., chap. 14, Hammurabi? If these are different forms of one name, was he a contemporary with Abraham? Is there any warrant for accepting Gen., chap. 14, as a strictly historical narrative of fact? As to these questions, there is need for more careful investigation than is usually

<sup>1</sup> This date has now been fixed by means of astronomical data.

given to this subject. Scholar after scholar writes as though these were among the most certain facts of history. It is dogmatically stated that Hammurabi and Abraham were contemporaries, that Hammurabi was one of the kings carrying away Lot, and that Abraham warred with this Babylonian king.

Principal Griffith Thomas writes: "Now it is recognized on all hands that the kings mentioned in this chapter [Gen., chap. 14] are historical and the story is shown to be true to life."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Orr writes: "One of the most striking instances of the confirmation of the historical accuracy of the patriarchal narratives is that connected with the expedition of Chedorlaomer in Gen., chap. 14. . . . In any case, it seems abundantly made out that the author of this chapter is not romancing, but writes with a clear knowledge of the historical conditions of the times to which his narrative relates."<sup>2</sup> Professor Sayce writes: "We have in this fourteenth chapter of Genesis the copy of a cuneiform text . . . the campaign of Chedorlaomer and his allies has been proved to be correct."<sup>3</sup> And now comes a defender of the historicity of this chapter in the person of Professor A. T. Clay of Yale, who, in an article in the *Christian Herald*,<sup>4</sup> is evidently trying to convince the readers of that paper that there has been discovered incontrovertible evidence for the historicity of the patriarchs, particularly Abraham.

After telling us what some of the extreme critics have said regarding the historicity of the patriarchs, and that

their views are even to be found, in a modified form, in the literature of our Sunday schools, "the result being that the child is impressed with the conviction that the patriarchs are not to be considered real characters," we are next informed that "archaeology, however, has come to the rescue, and has upset the theorists. . . . Whenever the monuments throw light upon the subject, the hypotheses are invariably found wanting." Professor Clay, as also Thomas, Orr, Sayce, and others, brings forward as evidence for the historicity of the patriarchs and for the historicity of the details of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis a certain tablet bearing the names of Kudur-Lagamar and Eri-Aku, who are accepted as the persons mentioned in Gen., chap. 14. Professor Clay writes: "After having ascertained that these kings of patriarchal times are historical personages, and that the background of the patriarchal period in Genesis is in absolute accordance with fact, the question can properly be asked: Is the historical character of the patriarchs themselves acknowledged by these critics?" We must be pardoned for asking what proof these tablets furnish for the historicity of the patriarchs. Is it scientific to argue that because we have discovered tablets bearing the names of kings who are recorded in Genesis (granting that the names are the same—a supposition open to serious doubt) the details of Gen., chap. 14, are correct and "true to life"? We do not forget that Professor Sayce some time ago wrote that "the vindication

<sup>1</sup> *Sunday School Times* for November 8, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *The Problem of the Old Testament*, pp. 410-12.

<sup>3</sup> *Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> August 5, 1914.

of the reality of Menes means the vindication of the historical character of the Hebrew patriarchs." What have facts proving the historicity of Menes or of Chedorlaomer and Arioch to do with proving the historicity of Abraham and Lot? The only implication to be drawn from the article by Professor Clay is that certain indisputable archaeological evidences have been discovered which prove beyond doubt the historicity of the patriarchs, else why be told that "archaeology has come to the rescue, and has upset the theorists"? The last lines of the article read thus: "Though the inscription [of Arioch in the Yale collection] does not have any direct bearing on questions of criticism, it is interesting in that it was written for one of the kings who invaded Palestine and who carried away Lot." But is not this assuming at the outset that Gen., chap. 14, is a record of fact before it is examined?

If the reader will work out the details of Gen. 11:31; 12:4; chaps. 13, 17, 21; 25:26; 47:9, 28; Exod. 6:16-20, details we cannot work out here because of lack of space, and read these in the light of almost certain archaeological evidence that Merenptah was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, he will find that dating the Exodus at *ca.* 1215 B.C., the date of the birth of Ishmael will fall *ca.* 1568 B.C., and the battle of Gen., chap. 14, *ca.* 1572 B.C., if we can argue from the conservative view of the Old Testament story.

This brings us to our third question: Is there any warrant for accepting Gen., chap. 14, as a strictly historical narrative of fact? We have seen that it is widely accepted that Amraphel and Hammu-

rabi are different forms of the one name of a well-known king living from 2123 to 2081 B.C. We can see also that the chronology of the patriarchs if accepted as given in Genesis and Exodus will not allow our placing the battle of Gen., chap. 14, earlier than 1572. How then can we accept the tradition so long held, that Hammurabi and Abraham were contemporaries? Either Amraphel and Hammurabi are not one and the same, a conclusion many scholars will not accept, especially the traditionalists, for this is one of their main arguments for the historicity of the story of the patriarchs; or they are the names of the same person, in which case we must, if we would be strictly historical in our investigation, give up the historicity of the chapter and declare it to be "a very late narrative of a midrash character." In either case the traditionalists have not made out their case.

We cannot dwell upon the details of this story as we should like, for that is not our purpose. Our purpose is to show that when it comes to treating supposed historical narratives historically we fail only too often by allowing a theory of the Scriptures to interfere. There is a period of about 550 years to be accounted for, accepting the facts of archaeology and the chronology of the patriarchal stories. Why should we turn away the intelligent truth-seeking reader from the Bible by adopting harmonistic shifts and expedients which, in interpreting other documents, we should disdain to use? We have not lost the Bible if some long-accepted story is proved to be a midrash. Why should the ancient Hebrews be refused their legendary stories more than any other

nation? The truth of the Bible does not involve the truth of everything in the Bible. To pledge the Bible to every detail coming from the most ancient past is to adopt a method that is bound to prove harmful both for the Scriptures and the readers.

We do not deny the historicity of the patriarchs. We think that some of the arguments of radical critics are absurd in the extreme. We must accept what the scholars can prove regarding their historicity, but we demand that they give us proof and not mere pious opinion, whether they be extremists or conservatives. The historicity of a person has not been proven when you have proved the historicity of some other person, and yet this is the argument of the scholars we referred to in the text. A late master in biblical science wrote some time ago:

Formerly the world in which the patriarchs moved seemed to be almost empty; now we see it filled with embassies, armies, busy cities, and long lines of traders passing to and fro between one center of civilization and another; but amid all that crowded life we peer in vain for any trace of the fathers of the Hebrews; we listen in vain for any mention of their names; this is the whole change archaeology has wrought: it has given us a background and an atmosphere for the stories of Genesis; it is unable to recall or certify their heroes.<sup>1</sup>

If this is so, what becomes of the statement of Professor Clay in the article already quoted: "Every atom of archaeological evidence that can be brought to bear upon the subject corroborates the view that the patriarchs are historical"? A background does not prove that a person lived against that

background, and to state that every atom of archaeological evidence proves their history is simply not true, for up to the present there has been no archaeological evidence discovered.

We make a plea that the facts of history be historically treated, and that no narrative shall be called historically correct until there is evidence, whether that narrative be in or outside the Bible. We have yet to prove to the other scientists our right to call our research "science." We are not scientific when with the narratives of the Bible we begin by saying that we accept these and it is for the doubter to prove his point, but with the difficult stories of other nations we begin by saying that we must hold our judgment until we have thoroughly tested them in the light of all possible evidence. History is history and legend, legend, whether it is in the classics of the Hebrew or the classics of Greece, and the law applying to one should be the law applying to the other.

We chose the narrative of Gen., chap. 14, not because it was the only one to choose, but because it seems to be the favorite chapter with those who are bent on claiming that archaeology is altogether in favor of the conservative position. It would be possible to bring the same charge against many scholars in their treatment of many other narratives, which, if in any other literature, would be at once assigned their proper place. We are glad for all the light archaeology has given us, but we must remember that illustration is not confirmation, and that the proving of one detail is not necessarily the proving of another.

<sup>1</sup> Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. liii.